

# WHEN WORK IS JOY

by Brian Bogert



In work and life, we hear that it's about the journey and not the destination, but what does that really mean? What does that look like?

I've been hiking more lately, enjoying the process of improving my health through a consistent struggle up a mountainside. I've enjoyed building the habit of controlling my breath and moving one foot in front of the other until I hit the peak. Despite any discomfort along the way, I always manage to reach the top of the mountain. But, what happens when I summit? There's always another mountain to climb. It's tempting to fall into a rhythm so focused on that narrow outcome that we miss the sights along the way.

In life and work, we are often sidelined by the demands of specific outcomes: a client acquisition, a completed project, a positive review, a raise or promotion. These finite goals call for a narrowed focus and threaten to block our view of anything beyond their scope. Technically, the goal of reaching the top requires only that I move my feet through dirt until I arrive there. Unfortunately, many people experience the feeling of this uninspired trip in their work. Even

worse, their dominant experience might be fraught with discomfort and pain.

Some of you reading this may be thinking work is called "work" and not "play" for a reason, right? Except, that's not really the whole picture. It's the narrowed one—the one taking in loose gravel, lactic acid buildup, and a promise to summit eventually. But it's the one missing the mountain entirely.

Every time I hike, the climb is different. Even the same trails present new struggles. I also change with each attempt; my strides are different lengths at different times and my feet inevitably land on different terrain. Sometimes the path is so steep it feels like I'm not even moving, and higher elevation further constricts each breath. I have to remind myself to stop and take in the scenery; acknowledge how far I've come, embrace every moment, and recognize all this journey is providing me.

## **Perspective and purpose disrupt the pull of the narrow focus.**

First, **purpose can change our perspective.** My son woke one morning adamant that he would embark on a hike with me and enjoy a picnic at the top of a mountain. His company reminded me this trail was a major achievement, particularly to a little boy experiencing strength and courage at a level previously unreachable. This was his first time seeing the "Valley of the Sun" (a.k.a. Phoenix, AZ) from that vantage point. The world seemed brand new to him, and I vividly remember the awe in his eyes at a scene I sometimes take for granted. My purpose was to provide my son

with the opportunity to have that experience.

As leaders, this is often the purpose that brings us to the mountain. Sometimes we need to help carry our teams with us, pack extra food and water, and consider the dangerous wildlife they don't know to be wary of yet. We are the ones responsible for the climb, and often that means carrying a heavier load. Of course, the weight of that load is often far exceeded by its rewards because we are committed to something larger than just ourselves.

I recently read *The Second Mountain* (2019) by cultural commentator David Brooks. Brooks defines the human experience as a journey through a metaphorical first and second mountain, making a distinction between them in his description of their respective ascents: "You conquer your first mountain. You identify the summit, and claw your way toward it. You are conquered by your second mountain. You surrender to some summons, and you do everything necessary to answer the call" (p. xvi).

Too often on my mountain treks alone, I was checking a box and solidly on my first mountain. When I returned to the trail with my son, I had a reason for being there beyond my self-concept or ego, and caught a glimpse of my second mountain.

Next, an **altered perspective can help uncover our purpose.** Purpose isn't always clear, and it can be easily forgotten. Sometimes, we must change our perspective in order to identify our purpose in the first place.

I admit, I didn't instantly or consistently remember my reason

for being on that hike with my son. It was the act of looking up, listening, and noticing that triggered the shift. I noticed my son's legs kick with enthusiasm and heard him laugh. I watched him claim his picnic spot triumphantly. Those moments reconnected me with my purpose for being there. This broader picture—like the one which includes a full expanse of a desert sunrise and my determined five-year-old—is infused with color, life, and wonder. It may still include the occasional kindergartner complaint or pulled muscle, but there is always more to see.

Again, as leaders, intentionally changing our perspective isn't simply to ensure we enjoy the trip; it is our responsibility to maintain perspective so that we might cultivate that opportunity for others as well. Committing ourselves through our work and life to a journey armed with perspective and transcendent purpose transforms each step into its own ultimate destination. It changes the landscape entirely, placing us squarely on Brooks' second mountain. It binds us intentionally to a business mission or life as a journey, not a destination. When this happens, we see teams inspired to contribute time and effort far beyond their prescribed duties; we see people surrendering their personal needs and doing everything necessary to "answer that call."

Once firmly grounded in a broader perspective, we are able to experience the mountain and a greater purpose. The Dalai Lama, Desmond Tutu, and Douglas Abrams share in *Book of Joy* (2016): "A healthy perspective really is the foundation of joy

and happiness because the way we see the world is the way we experience the world. Changing the way we see the world, in turn, changes the way we feel and the way we act, which changes the world itself" (p. 194).

Being a leader means taking on a tremendous responsibility to be disciplined in our broader perspective, practiced in presenting our best whole and authentic selves, and committed to serving a purpose bigger than ourselves.

There is also no greater power than owning that responsibility, and no greater joy than experiencing your unique journey to change the world itself.

#### Bibliography

Brooks, D. (2019). *The Second Mountain: The Quest for a Moral Life*. New York, NY: Penguin Random House.

Tutu, D., Lama, D., & Abrams, D. (2016). *Book of Joy: Lasting Happiness in a Changing World*. New York, NY: Penguin Random House.

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Many people dream of writing a book someday, but most of them never get around to doing it. As the author of multiple books, I can help you make this happen!

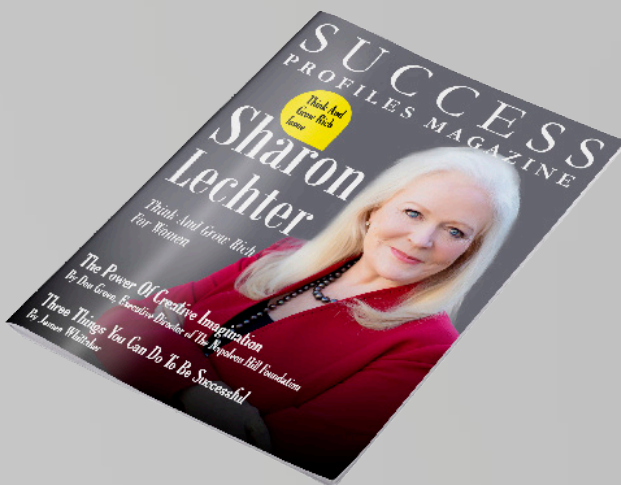
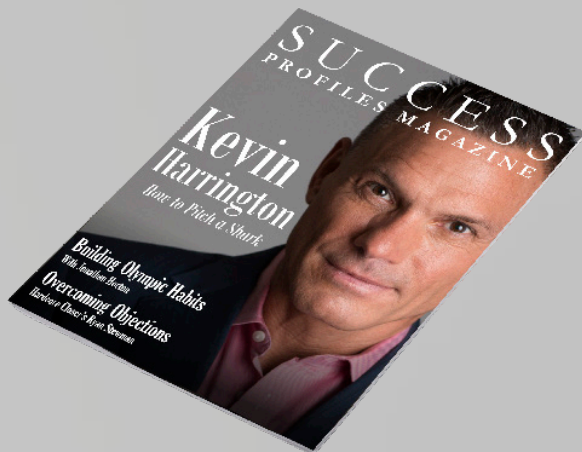
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